The Technical Side Of Calling

By Calvin Campbell

For the last several months, I have been watching some of the educational sessions for callers on video discussion groups like “Zoom”. I have also viewed several of the presentations by Grand Square International Callers. I have been reading a lot of articles by callers in Behind the Mic. The sessions and articles have been good if you like detailed technical choreography.

Calling and square dancing in 2020 sounds like a lot of work.

As a caller, you will be encouraged to create, without research, flawless combinations of “square dance basics” to amaze dancers. In addition, you will be expected to expand the knowledge and skills of the square dancers so that you will be able to create, without research, even more complex mental and physical puzzles.

As a square dancer, you will exercise your memory and comprehension of how to interpret and then obey complex commands to execute your role in a team exercise of coordinated physical interaction with a group of seven other people.

The interactions between the dancers and some callers has largely become a battle of wits. The caller has to analyze the knowledge and skills of a very diverse population of dancers and ascertain a common level of group competence. Then, the caller is supposed to use this knowledge to stress test his/her conclusions. Success is considered to be the reasonable rate of survival of most of the teams (squares) on the floor.

The knowledge of the caller is pitted against the knowledge of the dancers. The ideal goal of many callers is to push the envelope of the knowledge and combined skills of the dancers to just short of the point where the dancers throw up their hands in disgust and walk out the door.

As I’ve watched the presentations, the pressure on callers is often intense. The implication from some of the presenters is that if you can’t measure up to a very high technical understanding of the mathematical aspects of square dancing, you are falling short of your obligation to the dancers.

I sat in on a session the other night where the participants were displayed in thumbnail views on the side of the screen. I paged down the images of the audience and watched their reactions to what the speaker was presenting. A few callers were entranced with the technical tools that were being hyped. Most of the callers, both newer and experienced, looked shocked. Several of the callers have 20 to 40 years of experience.

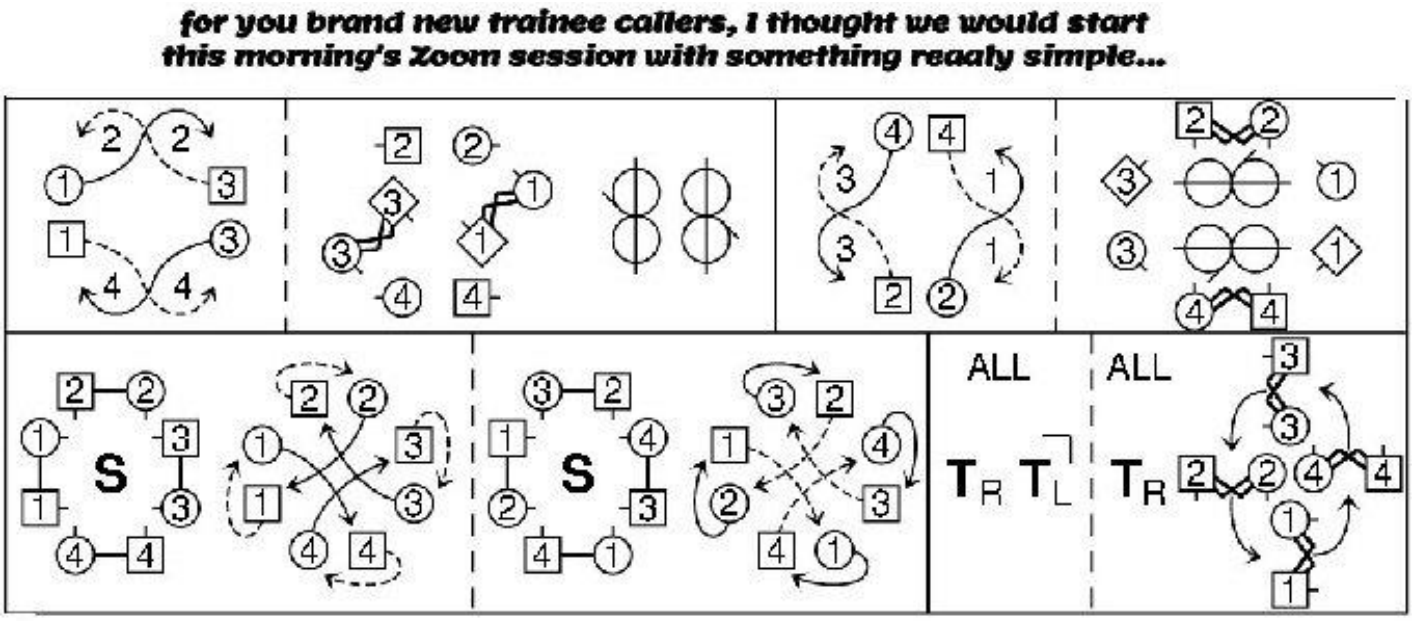
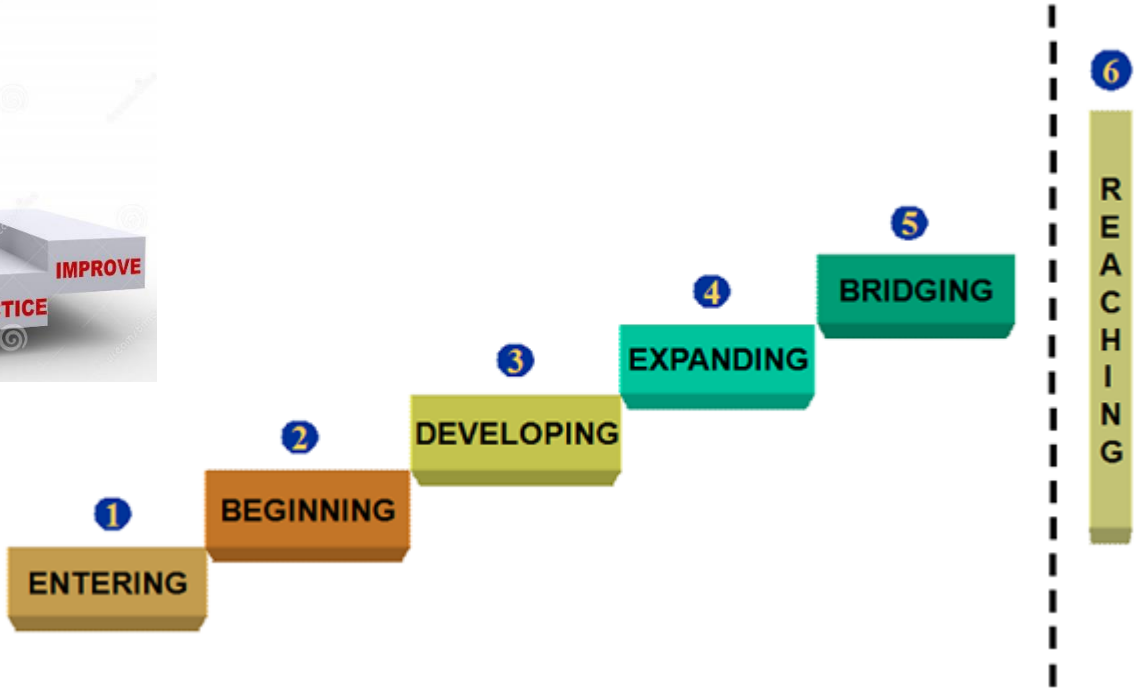
Some of the newer callers looked like they had been hit over the head with a wet bag of sand. The “bar of excellence” they were being presented was far higher than most of them could ever reach. It was certainly more than most of them would ever need.

There are concerns being voiced. There have been several articles expressing concern in BTM. Most of the articles are written by the more experienced callers who learned their craft in a far different environment. The technical knowledge demands on both the callers and the dancers were far less. The pace of learning was more leisurely. he dance style was very different. The calling style was very different.

How this will affect the total population of the dancers and callers is unknown.

- Will modern Western Square Dancing return to a less demanding environment?

- Will the technical side attract the major of the present dancers?

One thing is certain. The present conflicting styles of Modern Western Square Dancing cannot coexist in the present club system. The clubs will eventually have to choose a direction and hope for the best.

The same choice will have to be made by callers. They will have to decide whether to become technical experts or stay with the more traditional styles of calling square dances.